



Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development

Cook Islands Country Plan Summary

Background

Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development (*Pacific Women*) was announced by the Australian Government at the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders' meeting in August 2012. It commits up to \$320 million over 10 years in 14 Pacific Islands Forum member countries. The program aims to improve opportunities for the political, economic and social advancement of Pacific women. *Pacific Women* will support countries to meet the commitments they made in the 2012 Pacific Leaders' Gender Equality Declaration. The outcomes sought by *Pacific Women* are:

- Women, and women's interests, are increasingly and effectively represented and visible through leadership at all levels of decision making.
- Women have expanded economic opportunities to earn an income and accumulate economic assets.
- Violence against women is reduced and survivors of violence have access to support services and to justice.
- Women in the Pacific will have a stronger sense of their own agency, supported by a changing legal and social environment and through increased access to the services they need.

Pacific Women is managed by Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and works with a wide range of implementing partners, including the 14 partner governments, multilateral organisations, international and national non-government organisations, civil society organisations and the private sector.

The *Pacific Women* Support Unit technical and administrative services to assist in the management of the program, including planning, delivery and monitoring of activities, research and communications. The Support Unit is based in Suva, Fiji, with a sub-office in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea.

Cook Islands

Consisting of 15 islands and two reefs, the Cook Islands is home to around 21,000 people. Over the years, women in the Cook Islands have seen improvements in their status. An increasing number of women are involved in political affairs and decision making, economic activity and accessing police and counselling services. There have been improvements in maternal health and gender parity in primary and secondary level education.

Nevertheless, there is significant income disparity between women and men, with no change recorded in 2011 when compared to the 2006 census. In particular, there are still significant



challenges for women on the outer islands (known as the *Pa Enua*) where gender roles are stricter and their relative isolation and dependence on natural resources makes them more vulnerable.

The Cook Islands Government articulates its approach to gender equality in its National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment and Strategic Plan of Action 2011–2016. Since 2014, the government's focus has been on ending violence against women and improving women's economic empowerment.

Pacific Women Country Plan

Through *Pacific Women*, the Australian Government will spend approximately **\$3.9 million over 10 years** (2012–2022) on initiatives supporting women's empowerment in the Cook Islands.

Country Plans are the mechanism through which *Pacific Women* outcomes and activities are planned and agreed between DFAT and counterpart governments, following extensive national consultations. They provide detail on what will be funded and how these funding decisions are made. The first Country Plan was implemented from 2013–2017 with two activities working closely with the Cook Islands Gender Development Division of the Cook Islands Ministry of Internal Affairs. The activities:

- focused on research to expand and increase women's economic empowerment, promote and support women's businesses in the formal and informal sectors, support women's access to financial services and other productive assets to develop enterprises and support the integration of women with disabilities into socio-economic development
- improved legal frameworks, law enforcement and women's access to justice. This included improved coordination of crisis services, improving women's access to protective systems in rural communities, supporting the counselling services provided by Punanga Tauturu Inc. and providing free legal aid to survivors of violence.

During 2017–2018, *Pacific Women* is supporting two activities. These activities seek to enable the Cook Islands women to have a stronger sense of agency and support the elimination of violence against women through training, advocacy and access to support services for survivors. The activities under the Cook Islands Country Plan aim to increase the capacity of the Gender Development Office to deliver on the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy 2011–2016.

In addition to *Pacific Women*, DFAT makes an important contribution to gender equality in the Cook Islands through mainstreaming gender outcomes in the aid program, as well as through political, diplomatic and corporate activities.

Rationale for the activities in the Country Plan

The selection of activities in the Cook Islands Country Plan is based on the priorities of the Government, alignment with *Pacific Women's* outcomes and an assessment of current Government and development partner support. Activities respond to critical funding gaps where Australian assistance can make a difference and the ability for Australian investment to build on current programs to achieve increased scale or provide complementary investment.

(a) Women in leadership and decision making

Despite their comparatively high level of education and proven capacity to hold senior management positions, women are still poorly represented in public office. Far fewer women stand for election than men. Among the constraints limiting women's participation in politics and decision



making bodies are lack of time (due to a combination of family responsibilities and livelihood activities), lack of financial resources for campaigning, disaffection with mainstream political parties and limited networking and social capital.

(b) Increasing economic opportunities for women

Relatively high income per capita masks the subsistence lifestyle of the outer islands' population where remoteness limits access to public services, employment and markets. Greater dependency on natural resources for livelihoods increases people's vulnerability to climate change impacts. Gender roles are stricter in island communities and women have less opportunity to participate in decision making and local governance bodies.

There are many more women than men in the lowest income brackets in the Cook Islands. Women-headed households suffer greater risk of low income and social isolation, particularly households headed by elderly women.

(c) Reducing violence against women and expanding support services

Research indicates that 33 per cent of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner at least once in their lifetime.¹ Domestic and sexual violence is a sensitive issue in the Cook Islands. The majority of cases are not brought to court, particularly cases of intimate partner violence. The *Family Protection and Support Act* 2017 was passed in July 2017, providing additional measures to protect families and children from family violence.

(d) Enhancing women's agency

Despite having a clear gender equality and women's empowerment policy and delivery approach underpinned by political commitment, the ability of the Cook Islands Government and its development partners to meet these challenges is significantly constrained by a number of challenges. These include a lack of capacity within the Gender Development Office (there are only two staff in the office). There is a limited ability to mainstream gender equality across government programs, with limited production and use of sex-disaggregated data and gender analysis for guiding policy making, program design and service delivery.

There is also little accountability for mainstreaming gender at the institutional and individual levels and insufficient financial and human resources to implement a mainstreaming agenda. In 2012, the Pacific Community carried out a stocktake of the gender mainstreaming capacity of the Cook Islands. The report recommended strengthening the national women's machinery and providing appropriate human and financial resources to enable it to work effectively.

1 Te Marae Ora Cook Islands Ministry of Health, Cook Islands National Council of Women, and the United Nations Population Fund Cook Islands Family Health and Safety Study (2014).



Table 1: Bilateral Activities

PROJECT NAME AND PARTNER	DESCRIPTION	BUDGET
Outcome: Economic Empowerment		
An enabling environment for full participation of women in economic development (Gender and Development Division, Ministry of Internal Affairs)	Strengthened the capacity of the Cook Islands Government to identify new economic opportunities for women, promote and support women's businesses in the formal and informal sectors and support women's access to financial services.	\$590,000 (2013–2017)
Outcome: Ending Violence against Women		
Eliminating violence against women through training, advocacy and support services (Punanga Tauturu Inc.)	Providing support to Punanga Tauturu Inc. women's counselling centre to provide counselling, legal aid and conduct advocacy, focused on eliminating violence against women.	\$130,000 (2017–2018)
Strengthening capacity towards the elimination of violence against women (Gender and Development Division in partnership with the Cook Islands Police and Punanga Tauturu Inc.)	Strengthened the capacity of the Cook Islands Government to improve legal frameworks, law enforcement, justice systems and services to prevent and respond to violence against women.	\$190,000 (2013–2017)
Outcome: Enhancing Agency		
Increasing capacity to deliver on the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy (Gender and Development Division, Ministry of Internal Affairs)	Increasing the capacity of the Cook Islands Government to progress their Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy and provide secretariat support to the National Steering Committee through a national consultant and project funds.	\$70,000 (2017–2018)



Table 2: Regional Programs with activities in the Cook Islands

PROJECT NAME AND PARTNER	DESCRIPTION	BUDGET ²
Outcome: Leadership and Decision Making		
Pacific Women Parliamentary Partnerships Project (Australian International and Community Relations Office, Department of the House of Representatives)	Supported building the capacity of Pacific women parliamentarians and their staff to ensure gender equality issues are better addressed in parliament.	\$2,850,037 (2013–2018)
Outcome: Ending Violence against Women		
Support to the Pacific Community Regional Rights Resource Team (Pacific Community)	Focusing on supporting work on ending violence against women, human rights and good governance, RRRT works with Pacific island governments and civil society organisations by providing technical assistance, training and advocating for women and girls to have increased access to justice for domestic violence and to promote and protect human rights commitments.	\$5,750,000 (2015–2020)
Outcome: Enhancing Agency		
Partnerships for Health and Rights: Working for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights for all in the Pacific (International Planned Parenthood Federation)	Supporting the expansion of access to sexual and reproductive health services in the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea ³ , Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.	\$3,000,000 (2015–2022)
Progressing Gender Equality in the Pacific (Pacific Community)	Conduct stocktakes and support for the strengthening of government capacity to integrate gender equality and women's empowerment into policies, legislation and programs and improve the collection and analysis of data to better track outcomes.	\$3,941,712 (2013–2018) \$5,494,203 (2019-2023)

² This allocation is not for the Cook Islands alone but for multiple countries under *Pacific Women*.

³ Papua New Guinea included in phase two from 2019-2022

